

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0188

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, OVIP (KISSINGER, HENRY A.)

SUBJECT: VOA AND BBC BROADCAST RE POSSIBLE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT
ON SECRETARY

1. DURING MARCH 5 CALL ON PRESIDENT ASAD'S SECRETARY DABOUL AND PRESS ADVISER ELIAS TO DELIVER THANK-YOU MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY KISSINGER, MATTER CAME UP OF VOA AND BBC BROADCASTS THIS MORNING CONCERNING POSSIBLE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON SECRETARY KISSINGER'S LIFE WHILE IN DAMASCUS. MR. ELIAS SAID THE FACT THAT BBC CARRIED THE STORY DID NOT TROUBLE HIM BUT VOA'S COVERAGE WAS "REGRETTABLE." HE ADDED THAT HE REALIZED VOA IS INDEPENDENT OF THE GOVERNMENT BUT THAT FEW PEOPLE IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD APPRECIATE THIS FACT. HE CONCLUDED THAT HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THE STORY HAD TO BE CARRIED IN THE FIRST PLACE. I TOLD HIM I HAD NOT HEARD EITHER THE VOA OR THE BBC NEWS BULLETINS OF TODAY NOR DID I KNOW PROVENANCE OF STORY, BUT ASSURED HIM THAT THERE WAS NO SIGNIFICANCE IN THE TIMING OR INTENT OF THE VOA BROADCAST. MOREOVER, I REEMPHASIZED THE DEEP APPRECIATION OF THE SECRETARY AND OF MY OWN FOR EVERYTHING WHICH HAD BEEN DONE DURING SECRETARY'S VISIT TO ASSURE NOT ONLY HIS COMFORT BUT HIS SAFETY.

2. I JUST NOTICED ON THE AP TICKER OF MARCH 5 THAT THE STORY ORIGINATED FROM "AN AMERICAN OFFICIAL IN WASHINGTON." IN ADDITION, SAME TICKER STATES THAT SYRIAN GOVERNMENT SOURCES ARE BEING QUOTED
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AS SAYING THAT THE STORY IS "UNFOUNDED." I HAVE NOT, HOWEVER, SEEN

OR HEARD ANYTHING IN THE LOCAL MEDIA.

3. COMMENT: ELIAS DID NOT DWELL ON THE SUBJECT BUT IT WAS
OBVIOUS HE WAS SOMEWHAT PAINED. FRANKLY, I SHARE HIS PERPLEXITY
AS TO WHY THIS STORY HAD TO BE BROADCAST AT THIS TIME, IN VIEW OF
SYRIAN SENSITIVITIES ON THE QUESTION OF SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR
THE SECRETARY.
SCOTES

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